

First-Century Jewish Burial Practices

Second Temple Period: 516 BCE - 70 AD



Context & Case Study

The depicted first-century Jewish burial practices were primarily conducted in Second Temple Judea, especially in Jerusalem, Bethany region, or Judean hill country. These burial practices combined ritualistic purity, practical decomposition management, and familial continuity. Jewish people of higher class and wealth were buried similarly. These practices were heavily influenced by purity laws, called Tumah and Taharah. Maintaining this practice was feasible due to the heavy limestone concentration in the area. Most tombs belonged to Jewish persons of higher class and were kept within the family as a generational tomb.

Case Study: Yeshua of Nazareth, an ancient prophet, was killed by Roman soldiers near 30-33 AD. His remains are said to have been buried outside the walls of Jerusalem.

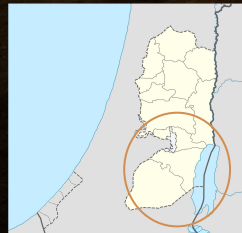


Photo Credit: NordNordWest



Kokhim: a niche carved into the walls of a tomb

Shrouds: linen coverings used to encase the body

Unguentaria: small clay or glass vessels used to contain oils, aloes, perfumes, ointments, or aromatics

What does this practice look like?

1. The deceased person's body is removed from location and processed *before* sundown, mostly due to purity laws, usually by family or local community.
2. They are transported to a tomb, called a Jewish Temple tomb or a rock-cut tomb, where the corpse was washed and anointed with aloes, oils, herbs, and spices for odor control and dignity. *Bodies weren't usually embalmed.*
3. Strips, shrouds, and head coverings made of linen were wrapped around the dead.
4. The person was either placed in a kokh/kokhim or loculus, bench, arcosolium, or rested on the ground where they would decompose naturally.
5. After about a year, the bones of the dead are placed into a carved limestone box, called an ossuary (depicted below), which remained in the tomb and is their final resting place.

References & Interpretation Notice:

- Megness, 11 - Ancient Jewish Tombs and Burial Customs (to 70 C.E.), Cambridge University Press, 2012
- Hachlili, et al., Jewish Funerary Customs During the Second Temple Period, in the Light of the Excavations at the Jericho Necropolis, Research Gate, 1983.
- Holzapfel et al., Jesus and the ossuaries: First-century Jewish burial practices and the Lost Tomb of Jesus: Religious studies center 2008
- Turnage, Biblical Israel: First Century Tombs and Burial, CBN Israel, 2025.
- Jewish Virtual Library n.d.
- New International Version, 1978, Mark 15:42-16:1, Matthew 27:57-61, Luke 23:50-56, John 19:38-42

Interpretation Notice: the imagery contained, unless otherwise cited, are AI-generated reconstructions based on archaeological evidence and textual sources related to the Second Temple Jewish burial practices. They are intended as a visual aid and for educational purposes only.

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